



March 16, 2017

HB 2376 Property Tax Lid – Testimony before the House Taxation Committee

I appreciate the opportunity to testify today regarding potential improvements in the Local Property Tax Lid. We understand the intended public policy objectives of the tax lid legislation that has been passed in previous sessions. Providing responsible government services that our citizens want and need, while being respectful of the taxpayers funding those services is something Wichita leaders take very seriously. At the City of Wichita, we back these words and principles with actions; the mill levy rate has been held steady in every adopted budget for the past 23 years, and our mill levy rate is among the very lowest of municipalities in our area.

I believe that some of the potential changes being contemplated would improve the tax lid law by enhancing transparency and citizen involvement, two concepts that are very important for Wichita. Current law requires the City Council to decide if an election is necessary by July 1 – before the City Council would even have a completed budget proposal. This would be very difficult to implement and would significantly alter and limit public engagement in our budget process. This seems to be out of alignment with the stated purposes of the tax lid.

The proposed bill would instead provide for a protest petition instead of a mandatory election, and such protest petition would be possible after a comprehensive budget proposal is presented to and considered by the City Council. This would greatly enhance engagement efforts, since our citizens would have until August to participate in the budget process (under current law, the decision to hold an election must be made by July 1).

The current statute requires a mandatory election under certain circumstances. As we know, elections can involve considerable expense. This proposed bill would actually provide a more immediate gauge of citizen sentiment, by way of a protest petition, without the cost of an election. A petition process would in many ways be easier for citizens to participate in, compared to an election. In short, this is a thoughtful solution that provides a voice to the community, without blindly requiring the expense of an election.

We all want responsible government. Our constituents demand it, and rightfully so. The current tax lid law includes more of an arbitrary, potentially costly, and somewhat unworkable election system – all in the name of responsible government. As Mayor of the City of Wichita, I believe the bill under consideration provides a much more cost effective, workable and citizen-friendly option.

Best Regards,

Mayor Jeff Longwell
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